

Pee Dee River Basin Council (RBC) Meeting #30 Minutes
December 3rd 2024

RBC Members Present: Megan Hyman, Michael Hemingway, Cliff Chamblee, Doug Newton, Buddy Richardson, Mike Bankert, John Crutchfield, Jeff Steinmetz, Eric Krueger, Lindsay Privette, Snipe Allen, Hughes Page, Tim Brown, Cynthia Walters, Jason Gamble, & Debra Buffkin

Absent: Frances McClary, Bob Perry, & John Rivers

Planning Team Present: JD Solomon, Matt Lindburg, Scott Harder, Brooke Czwartacki, Andy Wachob, Alexis Modzelesky, Jeff Allen, Tom Walker, & Chikezie Isiguzo.

Total Attendance: 31

1. Call the Meeting to Order (J. D. Solomon - Facilitator)

a. Review of Meeting Objectives

J. D. Solomon (the Facilitator) called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and welcomed the members to the 30th Pee Dee RBC meeting. He highlighted the meeting's objectives, including discussing the complete draft of River Basin Plan, voting on adoption of the draft Pee Dee River Basin Plan, and discussing next steps for public meetings and finalizing Plan.

b. Approval of December 3rd, 2024 Meeting Agenda and the October 22nd, 2024, meeting Minutes and Summary

The members unanimously approved the December 3rd, 2024, Pee Dee RBC meeting agenda.

Michael Hemingway moved and seconded by Megan Hyman the motion to adopt the October 22nd, 2024, Pee Dee RBC meeting minutes and summary.

J.D. Solomon outlined the process leading up to the final vote on a plan which is expected to take place in 2025. Before the vote, two public comment sessions will gather feedback and refine the plan.

At the current stage, members of the Pee Dee RBC are conducting an initial rating using a 1 to 5 scale (1 being full approval, 5 being complete disapproval). The main goal of this rating is to gather comments, not just a numerical score. Participants will be encouraged to provide specific feedback, even if they rate the plan neutrally or negatively, to identify areas for improvement. The ultimate objective is to refine the plan for approval when they reconvene in February or March 2025.

2. Public/Agency Comment (JD Solomon)

There was no public/agency comment.

3. Review/discussion of the completed Draft River Basin Plan (Matt Lindburg, Buddy Richardson)

Matt Lindburg provided an update on the revisions made to the plan since the October

meeting, emphasizing that while no major changes occurred, several refinements were implemented based on feedback. He explained that the revised version of the plan was sent out on November 5th for a two-week review period, during which stakeholders were encouraged to provide comments. Given the extensive nature of the full report, which spans over 200 pages, much of the feedback focused on the executive summary, as that section is likely to receive the most attention. Additionally, staff from the Department of Environmental Services (DES) conducted a review and contributed further details to enhance the plan.

One of the most significant areas of revision involved Chapter 10, which focuses on implementation. Feedback from the October meeting necessitated changes in other chapters as well, particularly regarding water loss control. The updated plan now acknowledges that while identifying water loss in public supply systems is important, addressing these issues requires financial investment. Consequently, the revisions stress the need for responsible and affordable rate increases to fund necessary improvements. Similarly, adjustments were made to the drought management strategy. Initially, the plan suggested that industries develop individual drought management plans, but this approach was reconsidered as it resembled regulatory mandates. Instead, the revised language emphasizes industry collaboration and the sharing of best practices for managing drought conditions.

Another key area of improvement was data and modeling. Responding to stakeholder concerns, the revised plan now includes objectives aimed at identifying and addressing data gaps. It also highlights the importance of the groundwater model, both in the short term—by ensuring its completion—and in the long term, by using it to make informed decisions regarding water management. Additionally, feedback from the October meeting underscored the need for greater engagement with North Carolina, particularly in understanding their approach to flood risks and drought-related water operations. As a result, an action item was added to facilitate coordination with the North Carolina water management group.

The revisions also addressed the applicability of water management strategies, recognizing that not all approaches are suitable for every region due to variations in local water supply challenges and regulatory constraints. To improve implementation clarity, the plan initially considered specifying which entities would be responsible for each action in the short-term implementation phase. However, Lindburg noted that reaching a consensus on this level of detail would require additional meetings and time that was not available. Instead, the current version maintains a structure consistent with other basin plans, outlining general roles for organizations such as the Regional Planning Committee (RPC), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and various contractors. The plan also now explicitly acknowledges the need for future discussions to clarify responsibilities when moving forward with implementation.

Finally, the updated plan highlights the importance of securing dedicated state staff and funding to support implementation efforts. Without these resources, the plan's effectiveness could be compromised. Lindburg concluded by assuring stakeholders that all

feedback had been incorporated, with only minor modifications where necessary, and invited any further questions before finalizing the revisions.

Matt Lindburg continued summarizing the feedback received between November 5th and November 19th, noting that most comments focused on the executive summary. Many of the suggested changes were minor, such as correcting typos or substituting specific words or sentences for clarity. The executive summary also included summaries detailing water usage across industrial, agricultural, and municipal sectors. Some participants expressed interest in creating a one- or two-page handout summarizing the entire plan, but Lindburg clarified that this was not originally within the project's scope. However, he pointed out that the executive summary already contained a two-page section titled "What to Know About This Plan," which succinctly outlined key issues such as surface and groundwater challenges and proposed solutions. This section could serve as a standalone handout, or an outreach document could be developed later during the implementation phase.

One significant comment came from John Crutchfield, who observed that a graph depicting projected water demand under a high-demand scenario until 2070 appeared to suggest an increasing need for water in nuclear power generation. Lindburg admitted that this was unintentional and acknowledged that the visualization could be misleading. To address this, the data was reorganized to clearly indicate that water demand for nuclear power is expected to remain constant, while the increasing demand projections apply to other sectors. This revision ensured a more accurate representation of future water needs.

In addition to stakeholder feedback, the Department of Environmental Services (DES) conducted a concurrent review and provided additional insights on key areas. One focus was on agricultural groundwater use, particularly in the upper and middle parts of the basin. Analysis of groundwater hydrographs revealed that areas closer to the recharge zone experience more stable groundwater levels, while areas farther away show some declines. In agricultural settings, groundwater levels fluctuate seasonally due to irrigation demands, with noticeable recovery during wet periods. This seasonal variation suggests that long-term declines in groundwater levels in these areas may be less severe than in locations with continuous groundwater withdrawals.

The discussion also touched on nuclear power and its future water demand. Some participants questioned whether projections should assume constant water use, given the potential for new nuclear plants or changes in energy generation strategies. While Lindburg initially assumed nuclear water demand would remain stable, others pointed out that future energy needs might lead to additional plants being built, though possibly outside South Carolina. John Crutchfield added that existing nuclear plants might be retooled for different energy sources in the future, potentially reducing water consumption rather than increasing it. These considerations highlighted the need for flexibility in future updates to the plan, which will be reviewed and revised every five years.

Lindburg concluded by reaffirming that all feedback had been incorporated into the plan where appropriate and that revisions aimed to clarify key issues without introducing assumptions beyond current projections. The adjustments made ensure that the plan

remains both accurate and adaptable to future developments in water management and energy needs.

4. **RBC 1234 Vote (JD Solomon)**

J.D. Solomon provided an overview of the next steps for finalizing and approving the river basin plan. He stated that the goal is to reconvene the group in late February, but realistically, due to the time required for public comment, the final approval might take place in the third or fourth week of March. The process will consist of the current meeting, two public comment sessions, and a final gathering to decide on the plan's adoption.

He emphasized that the final vote will be a simple thumbs-up or thumbs-down decision. While no plan will perfectly satisfy every stakeholder, the key consideration is whether members can support its implementation and work to improve it over time. The voting process is structured to gauge levels of agreement among RBC members, as outlined in the group's bylaws.

Solomon also addressed membership updates, noting that John Crutchfield of Duke Energy is retiring at the end of the year, and a replacement will likely be in place for the March vote. He also discussed the closure of the International Paper (IP) facility in Georgetown, affecting stakeholder representation. Given Megan's long-standing involvement in the planning process, he advocated for her continued participation in the vote, even if she is no longer employed by IP, to ensure industrial stakeholder representation.

Reflecting on the planning process, Solomon highlighted efforts to maintain transparency and inclusivity. The group formed committees for each chapter, reviewed sections incrementally, and sought broad input to prevent last-minute disputes. He praised members for their engagement and contributions despite their other professional obligations.

The members ranked their support for the draft plan on a scale from 1 to 5:

- 1: Full endorsement—strong approval.
- 2: Endorsement but with Minor Points of Contention (concerns but general agreement).
- 3: Endorsement but With Major Points of Contention (Significant concerns but still acceptable.)
- 4: Stand Aside with Major Reservations (Member cannot live with it in its current state and can only support it if changes are made)
- 5: Withdraw. Member will not support the Draft River Basin Plan and will not continue working within the RBC's process. Member has decided to leave the RBC.

Online Votes:

Tim Brown – 1 (Fully endorses the plan, found it thorough with no disagreements).

Debra Buffkin (Winyah Rivers) – 2 (Believes it is passable, with only minor tweaks needed).

Jeff Steinmetz – 2 (Submitted his rating in advance but could not attend due to a class).

Eric Krueger – 1 (Initially debated between 1 and 2 but concluded it was the best possible plan given the available data. Appreciated the focus on implementation and environmental interactions).

Hughes Page – 1 (Praised the facilitation and communication efforts of the group).

John Crutchfield – 1 (Called it a very solid plan, developed with the best available data despite limitations with the groundwater model).

In-Person Votes:

Jason Gamble – 2 (Found the plan strong overall, with minor concerns but satisfied with the representation of the agricultural community).

Megan Hyman – 1 (Fully supports the plan but emphasized the need for strong communication efforts to help the general public understand the technical aspects).

Cynthia Walters – 2 (Raised concerns about the plan's exclusive focus on drought and shortages without addressing flooding, which has been a major issue in the basin).

Michael Hemingway – 2 (Supports the plan but wants to review the executive summary again to ensure key points are clearly communicated, as most readers won't go beyond this section).

Doug Newton – 2 (Hasn't fully studied the plan but supports it generally, leaving the door open for any potential refinements).

Cliff Chamblee – 2 (Supports the plan but remains slightly concerned about the water model and overall communication aspects).

Buddy Richardson – 1 (Strongly endorses the plan and praised the process and collaboration among stakeholders).

Pending Votes:

Bob Perry – Was absent but previously indicated a positive opinion, expected to be a 1 or 2.

John Rivers – Was absent but did not raise any prior objections, likely to provide a positive rating.

Frances McClary – Was unable to attend but previously expressed positive views on the plan.

J. D. Solomon will follow up to get their official votes.

General Consensus and Observations

The majority of members rated the plan as 1 (full endorsement) or 2 (minor concerns but overall approval).

No members rated the plan as 3, 4, or 5, indicating no significant opposition.

The key concerns among those who gave a 2 included noting the need for a clearer public communication to make the technical aspects more accessible, a desire to review and refine the executive summary to ensure clarity, the absence of flood management considerations in the plan, and the need for further study on the groundwater model.

J.D. Solomon concluded by thanking the group for their dedication and engagement throughout the process. He reiterated that the group had worked hard to incorporate diverse perspectives and ensure transparency. After public comments, the plan will move forward for final approval, and any additional refinements will be considered before the final vote in March. He reiterated that while the goal is broad consensus, the plan should ideally be something members support, not just tolerate. He thanked everyone for their dedication and stressed the importance of ensuring a well-supported final plan.

5. **Schedule and Next Steps (JD Solomon)**

J.D. Solomon outlined the next steps for finalizing and approving the river basin plan. The team will incorporate any informal comments by Friday, December 6, 2024, allowing the plan to be advertised for the required 30-day public comment period. The draft plan will be posted online, and a live public meeting will be held to present it, gather feedback, and determine if further refinements are necessary. If significant comments arise, adjustments will be made before a second public meeting. The final vote is tentatively set for the fourth Tuesday of February or possibly March, depending on the volume of feedback.

He emphasized the importance of stakeholder communication, noting that the public needs to understand that this is their plan, not something imposed by regulatory authorities. He encouraged council members to engage their networks to ensure broad awareness and participation actively. Given the expected attendance, the presentation format will likely be PowerPoint rather than interactive sessions.

He also reiterated that the public comment process will rely on written submissions, which will be compiled and summarized, with form letters grouped together rather than counted as individual comments. The public will not be able to view real-time comments, but all feedback will be documented in the final plan.

Final Reflections from the Members of the Pee Dee RBC:

Several members shared their appreciation for the process and the opportunity to collaborate across sectors:

- Tim Brown, Deborah, and Hughes Page expressed satisfaction with the process and the group's professionalism.
- John Crutchfield, who is retiring in his professional career, reflected on his 44-year career and commended the council for being one of the best working groups he has ever participated in.
- Jason and Cynthia appreciated the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions and learn from different perspectives.
- Michael and Lindsey noted the non-contentious nature of the discussions and the commitment to working together despite varying interests.
- Andy, Scott, and Joe (DES) acknowledged the challenges and successes of the process, particularly the delays with the groundwater model, but affirmed the value of the stakeholder-driven approach.
- Buddy, the Council Chair, gave a heartfelt closing statement, praising the dedication of each

member and highlighting the importance of collaborative water resource planning. He emphasized that participation in the council is not just about the plan itself but also about building relationships and understanding the challenges of different sectors.

6. Closing Comments and Upcoming Topics (Buddy Richardson/JD Solomon)

Solomon concluded by thanking everyone for their commitment and perseverance. Despite challenges such as organizational changes, extended timelines, and technical hurdles, the Members of the Pee Dee RBC remained engaged and focused. He commended their dedication to the process and reiterated that while there is still work to do, they are substantially close to finalizing the plan.

Buddy Richardson formally dismissed the meeting.

The next meeting of the Pee Dee RBC will be held on February 18th, 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 11:14 AM.

Minutes: Chikezie Isiguzo and Tom Walker

Approved: 3/4/25

RBC Chat:

09:01:15 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

will begin soon, waiting on a few more to arrive

09:04:18 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

waiting five more minutes, we have a quorum but waiting for a few more

09:15:11 From John Crutchfield Jr. to Everyone:

Having connectivity issues

09:15:50 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

sorry, is everyone else viewing/hearing this ok?

09:16:04 From Jeff Steinmetz to Everyone:

I am hearing/veiwng just fine.

09:16:08 From Eric Krueger to Everyone:

Yes, all good here..

09:16:11 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

ok thanks

09:17:13 From John Crutchfield Jr. to Everyone:

ok now

09:45:55 From Jeff Steinmetz to Everyone:

I another meeting, so wanted to leave my comments. On the whole, I think everyone did a great job with the plan. I'm very happy with the basin descriptions, discussions of past/current water use, etc. I feel very good about the SWAM model/surface water analysis. And this is no one here's fault, but I do wish we had the groundwater model to do a similar analysis for groundwater – and I know that will come in the future. I also like the comments that in the future we should consider water quality, climate change, and flooding issues. I also like how thorough the discussion of potential management strategies is. As with any one of us, I may prioritize things a little differently, but I'm overall happy with what's here. So given all of this, my vote would be a 2 – minor concerns (such as lack of a groundwater model, incorporating coastal areas better), but overall, I think it's a very solid plan, based on the best science we have available right now, that I can live with.

09:46:21 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

thanks jeff

09:59:21 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

10 min break

10:09:24 From alexis.modzelesky to Thomas Walker (direct message):

Hey Tom, I need to jump off for a bit and troubleshoot some stuff with the VPN. I'll hop back on as soon as I can.

10:29:36 From Heena Patel to Everyone:

Thank you Dr. Allen

10:30:33 From Heena Patel to Everyone:

And Dr. Walker

10:31:02 From Winyah Rivers to Everyone:

We will share the public meetings on social media and in newsletters when the time and locations are decided. Thank you!

10:51:47 From Winyah Rivers to Everyone:

I have a meeting with the Darla Moore Foundation at 11. I have to step off of the call. Thank you so much!

10:52:17 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

thank you Debra

11:02:12 From Tim to Everyone:

I have another meeting to go so I'm dropping off. Thanks.

11:02:23 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

thanks tim

11:14:25 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:

meeting adjourned